

1 Peter 1:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Analysis

Peter grounds the holiness command in Scripture's authority. "Because it is written" (dioti gegraptai, διότι γέγραπται) uses the perfect tense gegraptai indicating action completed in past with enduring results: Scripture was written and remains authoritative. This formula introduces Old Testament quotations throughout New Testament, affirming Hebrew Scriptures' binding authority. The quotation: "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (hagioi esesthe, hoti egō hagios eimi, ἄγιοι ἔσεσθε, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἄγιος εἰμί) directly cites Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7. The command "be holy" is imperative—divine order, not mere suggestion. The reason "for I am holy" reveals holiness's ultimate foundation: God's own character. Because Yahweh is intrinsically, essentially, eternally holy, His people must be holy. The logic is covenantal: God's people bear His name, represent His character, manifest His glory. Holiness isn't primarily about human flourishing (though it produces that) but about God's glory—reflecting Creator's perfection, vindicating His reputation, displaying His nature. The phrase also implies enabling grace: the holy God who commands holiness provides power to obey through regenerating and sanctifying Spirit. Holiness flows from relationship with holy God, not human effort to impress or manipulate Him.

Historical Context

By quoting Leviticus, Peter establishes continuity between Old and New Covenants. The same God who demanded Israel's holiness demands church's holiness. However, the nature of holiness shifted: Old Covenant emphasized ceremonial separation (dietary laws, ritual purity, Sabbath observance, separation

from Gentiles) pointing forward to Messiah; New Covenant emphasizes moral/ethical holiness (love, purity, truth, justice) enabled by indwelling Spirit. Jesus fulfilled ceremonial law (Matthew 5:17), so believers aren't bound by kosher regulations or circumcision, but moral law's demands intensify—Jesus radicalized commandments by addressing heart, not just actions (Matthew 5:21-48). For Jewish Christians tempted to retain ceremonial regulations or Gentile Christians confused about Law's role, Peter clarifies: holiness remains essential, grounded in God's unchanging character, but manifests differently post-Christ. Reformed theology's third use of Law (teaching believers how to live gratefully in light of grace) finds support here—Law no longer condemns but guides sanctified living.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does grounding the holiness command in God's character ("I am holy") rather than arbitrary rules change your motivation for pursuing godliness?
2. What's the relationship between God's holiness and your holiness, and how does union with Christ enable you to become holy?

Interlinear Text

διότι	γέγραπται	ἅγιος	γένεσθε,	ὅτι	ἐγὼ	ἅγιος	είμι
Because	it is written	holy	Be ye	for	I	holy	am
G1360	G1125	G40	G1096	G3754	G1473	G40	G1510

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 11:44 (Holy): For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Leviticus 19:2 (Holy): Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.

Leviticus 20:7 (Holy): Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God.

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